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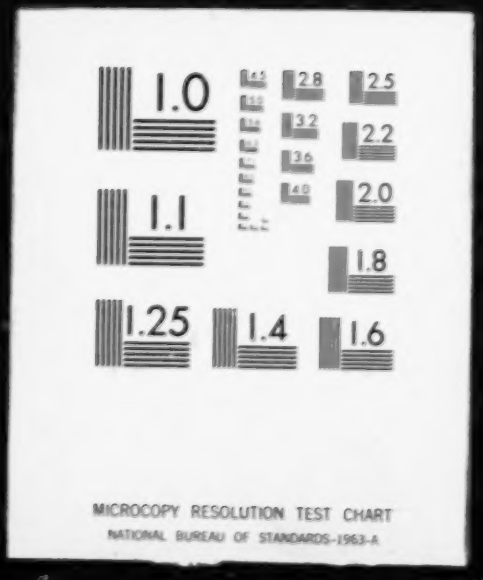

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ABSTRACT

The study of teacher attitudes investigated the issues of identification and labeling of children as mentally retarded in relation to social class and out of school adaptation. Nine student profiles giving identical school performance and testing information but differing in information on social class and behavior outside school were the bases of the questionnaire administered to approximately 200 geographically scattered teachers. Non-deviant behaviors (both competent and incompetent) were considered adaptive at the upper-middle class level while only competent behaviors (both deviant and non-deviant) were considered adaptive at the lower class levels. The perceived appropriateness of the mental retardation label appeared to be a function of social class with the student of low social class more likely to be labeled retarded. Teacher decisions concerning the appropriateness of the mental retardation label were not integrated with decisions regarding adaptiveness. (DB)

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The Educable Mentally Retarded Child: Current Issues and Teacher Attitudes[1]

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Curriculum Research and Development

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In recent years the Educable Mentally Retarded (EMR) child has been the subject of much discussion among special educators and related professionals. The inadequacy of the identification process and related sociological issues, the negative effect of the mentally retarded "label" on behavioral expectations for the child, and the validity of the class placement issue (special/regular) as opposed to a primary emphasis on curriculum considerations based on individual differences have all received attention (Dunn, 1968; Heber, 1961; Lilly, 1970; Goldstein, 1969; MacMillan, 1971; Hurley, 1971; PCMR, 1969; Jones, 1972; Cole & Bruner, 1971). Much attention concerning these issues has focused on the administrative systems that are responsible for the organization of the schools, on the educational systems that are responsible for the training of teachers of EMR children, and in some cases on the children themselves who are somehow labeled as special. Less attention has been paid to the very decisive role the teacher plays in the processes and issues connected with mental retardation. Yet, it is precisely this classroom professional who most frequently initiates or terminates placement, and is responsible for the total educational input of the child. Given this role, it is important to assess teacher decision making in the major areas affecting the education of EMR children. This paper reports on the issues of identification and labeling of children as mentally retarded based on a larger study of teacher attitudes.

Method

Profiles

Teacher attitudes were assessed through their responses to hypothetical, but realistic profiles or sketches of students. Each profile contained information concerning the social class of the child, his school performance including IQ and achievement data, and his behavior in the community or neighborhood outside the school setting. In all sketches the school performance information and the IQ and achievement data were identical. A complete presentation of this portion of the profiles is contained in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Nine profiles were generated by combining three levels of social class in conjunction with three types of outside school behavior. Social class was operationally defined with reference to the occupation of head of household, type of residence, and parental involvement in school activities. A complete description of the social class levels employed in the sketches is presented in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

The three types of outside school behavior were adapted from distinctions and definitions suggested by Farber (1968) and Freidson (1962) and consisted of competent non-deviant behavior, competent deviant behavior, and incompetent nondeviant behavior. These behaviors were operationally defined with respect to peer group associations, leadership, the use of free time, and behavioral deviancy or non-deviancy based on standards typically accepted by a dominant,

middle-class society. A complete description of each type of outside school behavior is presented in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

Each sketch was constructed by employing one of the three social class levels to introduce the child, followed by the school performance and IQ and achievement data and, finally, one of the three types of outside school behavior. While the profiles contained specific information, they were also intended to be open to interpretation so as to permit attitudes to influence the teacher's judgment about the child (Asch, 1952; Guskin, 1962). For this reason, age-specific information was not included, but could be estimated from the data about the child and the number of times he was tested over a period of years. The length of the nine profiles did not vary by more than thirty words, and minimum changes were made to achieve the differences desired. All sketches represented male students. This decision was made for two reasons: first, the sex ratio of special classes typically shows a preponderance of males; second, the teacher pool available for the study was not considered large enough to obtain a reliable number of responses for the use of additional female profiles.

Questionnaire

Questions were developed to reflect most of the major decisions that are made concerning the education of EMR children. These areas include the adaptiveness of behaviors, identification (labeling), class placement, curriculum considerations, and the expected life chances of the child in the future. In addition, a number of questions dealt with the meaning of various labels (mental retardation, learning disability, brain damage, emotional

disturbance, cultural disadvantagement), the extent to which they are considered damaging to the child, and the degree to which the behaviors associated with the labels are capable of being changed. Teachers were also asked to estimate the number and proportion of students in their class who appeared to be functioning like the child described in the profile they received.

This paper presents data on the first two questions, namely, teacher decisions concerning the adaptiveness of the child and the appropriateness of the mental retardation label as opposed to other classifications of exceptionality. The first question was assessed categorically (adaptive/non-adaptive) while the second was scored on a continuum from one to five, with the lower end of the scale indicating functioning most like a retardate and the upper end indicating functioning least like a retardate.

Sample

Thirty-six randomly selected teacher clusters in the field test network of the Curriculum Research and Development Center in Mental Retardation were randomly assigned one of the nine profiles (four clusters per profile). Each cluster includes approximately eight teachers located in the same geographic region of the United States. The total sample, then, consisted of 288 teachers from sixteen states. The profiles were randomly assigned by cluster rather than by teacher to minimize communication among teachers about the differences in the profiles. Seventy percent of the questionnaires were returned (N=200). However, the total N for the analysis of several questions was less than 200 because some teachers did not return a completed questionnaire.

Results

Adaptiveness

Effects of Social Class

The chi square analysis for the overall effect of the social class of the profiles on the teacher's decision concerning adaptiveness is presented in Table 4, while Tables 5, 6, and 7 contain the chi square analyses for the effect of social class for each outside school behavior.

Insert Tables 4, 5, 6, and 7 about here

All analyses tested the hypotheses that the response proportions are not significantly different across the three social classes, i.e., $P_{UM} = P_{LM} = P_{L}$. The results indicate that this dimension is not associated with differences in the response proportions unless it is considered in conjunction with one of the outside school behaviors. For the competent deviant pattern, the lower the class, the more adaptive the behavior is rated by the teachers (see Table 6).

Effect of Outside School Behavior

The chi square analysis for the overall effect of the behavior patterns in the profiles on the teacher's decision concerning adaptiveness is presented in Table 8, while Tables 9, 10, and 11 contain the chi square analyses for the effect of the behavior patterns for each social class.

Insert Tables 8, 9, 10 and 11 about here

Again, all analyses tested the hypothesis that the response proportions are not significantly different across the three types of outside school behavior, i.e., $P_{CN-D} = P_{CD} = P_{IN-D}$. Although the overall differences indicate that the

competent non-deviant is rated by the teachers as the most adaptive, there are clear differences relating to social class. In the upper-middle class profiles, the competent non-deviant pattern is considered most adaptive, followed closely by the incompetent non-deviant pattern. In the lower-middle class profiles, the competent non-deviant is again considered the most adaptive along with, possibly, the competent deviant pattern. It is in the lower class profiles, however, where there is much clearer evidence that these latter two incompatable patterns (competent deviant and competent non-deviant) are considered adaptive. Thus, it appears that deviant as well as non-deviant behavior patterns are considered adaptive in the two lowest classes, while only non-deviant patterns are adaptive in the upper middle class.

Appropriateness of Mental Retardation Label

Effect of Social Class

The cell means and standard deviations for the teachers' judgment of the appropriateness of the mental retardation label in the nine profiles are presented in Table 12, and Table 13 contains the results of a three (Social Class) X three (Behavior) non-orthogonal analysis of trend.

Insert Tables 12 & 13 about here

The results indicate that the linear component for social class is significant, suggesting that the lower the social class of the profiles, the more appropriate the label. Although the linear trend appears strongest for the competent-Deviant behavior pattern, none of the simple effects reached significance

(see Tables 14, 15, and 16).

Insert Tables 14, 15, & 16 about here

Effect of Outside School Behavior

The findings suggest that the different behavior patterns in the profiles are not significantly related to the teacher's judgment concerning the appropriateness of the label (see Tables 13, 17, 18, and 19).

Insert Tables 17, 18, & 19 about here

Adaptiveness and Use of Mental Retardation Label

The point biserial correlations (r_{pbi}) between the teacher's judgments concerning adaptiveness of the child and the appropriateness of the mental retardation label for each profile as well as those for each social class and outside school behavior are presented in Table 20.

Insert Table 20 about here

The results indicate that teacher decisions concerning adaptiveness are quite independent of those concerning the appropriateness of the mental retardation label.

Summary of Results

Teacher decisions concerning the appropriateness of the mental retardation label are not integrated with decisions regarding adaptiveness. A polarity concerning these two decisions is most evident among the profiles involving competent deviant outside school behavior. For this pattern, the lower the

social class, the more adaptive, and, at the same time, the more appropriate the retarded label becomes. Judgments regarding adaptiveness appear sensitive to differences in the outside school behavior patterns in conjunction with social class, while teachers' decisions concerning the appropriateness of the label are most sensitive to differences in the social class of the profiles.

Discussion

In 1961, the American Association of Mental Deficiency (AAMD) published a manual on terminology and classification in mental retardation which included the following definition of retardation: "Mental retardation refers to sub-average general intellectual functioning which originates during the developmental period and is associated with impairment in adaptive behavior" (Heber, 1961, p.3). This represented an attempt to move to a functional approach to diagnosis in that it was based on observable, measurable indices of development and on present rather than past or potential behavior (Robinson & Robinson, 1965). The definition also represented an effort to move away from a strict reliance on intelligence quotient data and incorporate other elements into the differential diagnosis of mental retardation. Thus, while attention is paid to both intelligence and the developmental course of the individual, the impairment of adaptive behavior must be established for the diagnosis of mental retardation to be made. While certain relevant guidelines were incorporated into the assessment of adaptive behavior, i.e., adaptive behavior is assessed successively by maturation and acquisition of early developmental skills for pre-school years, rate of learning academic skills for school years, and social adjustment as shown by social and vocational competency for post-school years, these guidelines are neither complete nor functional. For example, the assessment of adaptive behavior solely in terms of

academic development for school age children either assumes that the six hour school day is reflective of the entire day or that outside school behaviors are not a valid factor to be considered in diagnosis. The confusion surrounding the criteria for adaptive behavior can also be noted by the differences in the ratings of adaptiveness given to the nine profiles. It is clear that teachers expanded the meaning of adaptive behavior to include parameters beyond academic considerations which were held constant in all the profiles. Teachers appear to subscribe to different views of adaptive behavior depending on the social class of the child. For the upper-middle class profiles, a deviancy model of adaptiveness best fits the data. Under this model, outside school behavior that is likely to threaten the established social structure (competent deviant) is considered non-adaptive, while those patterns that do not pose a threat are considered adaptive (competent non-deviant; incompetent non-deviant). Regarding the lower two classes, a competency model appears more appropriate. Given this view, outside school behaviors that represent competency (competent deviant; competent non-deviant) are considered adaptive, while incompetent behavior (incompetent non-deviant) behavior is judged non-adaptive.

Regardless of the parameters affecting the teacher's decision concerning adaptive behavior, the resultant decision is not incorporated into the labeling process. Instead, the decision concerning the appropriateness of the mental retardation label is a function of the social class of the profile; the lower the class, the more appropriate the mental retardation label becomes. In substance, then, these findings are at considerable variance with the AAMD position which requires the integration of both decisions. Nor can it be argued that the issues raised around the AAMD definition are of little relevance to

teachers because they view retardation primarily in terms of school problems and related academic issues. If this were the case, no social class bias in rated level of retardation should have been detected since all profiles contained identical school performance information and IQ and achievement data.

The expansion of the definition of adaptive behavior and the subsequent failure to integrate that criterion into the definition have immediate implications for teachers. As noted, the largest discrepancy between the ratings of adaptiveness and the appropriateness of the mental retardation label occurs in the lower two social classes when outside school behavior is most discontinuous (competent deviant) with the values typically reinforced by the schools. This discrepancy results in the selective identification and labeling of a group of children who are adaptive outside school and retarded in school. These children are referred to as the "six-hour" retarded in an effort to differentiate them from the functionally retarded who can be labeled by a strict interpretation of the parameters of the AAMD definition (PCMR, 1969). Most importantly, these two types of children are likely to pose immediate problems to the classroom teacher who is attempting to meet both group and individual needs. Unfortunately, the use of the "six-hour" retardate label appears to reinforce that which its creation is intended to prevent since it emphasizes the "six-hours" of retarded behavior as opposed to the "eighteen-hours" of non-retarded behavior. Indeed, it seems to justify the inappropriate labeling of children which has as its first effect the increase of heterogeneity of children in special classes.

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Footnotes

[1] The preparation of this paper was supported by a Grant from the U.S. Office of Education, Bureau for the Education of the Handicapped, Project #H 630041 A.

Table 1

School Performance Information

and IQ and Achievement Data

Johnny's most obvious difficulty in school is in communicating with others. He has trouble in getting his own ideas across and in understanding the ideas of others. In both his written and oral work he makes many grammatical errors. Johnny rarely completes his school assignments without assistance. Although he typically makes attempts to do his homework, his efforts demonstrated a lack in comprehending either the directions or the content of the assignment. This tends to be more true of his verbal than his quantitative work. Johnny also does better in rote learning than in interpreting material of a more complex nature. Johnny is not a discipline problem, nor does he have any difficulty in following rules and regulations established by the school. However, when he makes mistakes, he does tend to become frustrated and has been known to rip up his papers in disgust. In school, he has been tested three times over a period of six years. On standard intelligence tests he obtained scores between 68 and 81, and on achievement tests typically performed at a level two to four grades below national norms.

Table 2

Three Social Class Levels

Upper Middle Class
Johnny Jones lives with his parents in an eight-room home, purchased directly after his father was promoted to a middle management position in a rather large company. Johnny's mother, a housewife, frequently attends Parent-Teacher conferences at the school in order to discuss his problems with his teachers.
Lower Middle Class
Johnny Jones lives with his mother, father, and two younger brothers in a small, four-room house close to the factory where Mr. Jones is employed as a semi-skilled worker. Mrs. Jones irregularly attends Parent-Teacher conferences to discuss Johnny's problems with his teachers.
Lower Class
Johnny Jones lives with his mother and three younger brothers in a one-bedroom apartment in an older multiple-family dwelling. Since Johnny's mother is unskilled and unemployed, support for the family is provided by the welfare program. Due to the presence of the young children at home and the lack of child-care facilities, the mother is unable to respond to requests from teachers inviting her to attend the Parent-Teacher conferences in order to discuss Johnny's problems.

Table 3

Three Types of Outside School Behavior

Competent Non-Deviant Behavior
Outside of school, Johnny has become an important member of a closely-knit group of boys who are active in an ecology club formed at a local youth center. The group is organized to clean debris from streets and vacant lots in the(neighborhood) (community). Frequently, they find bottles and cans which are sold for recycling. They also systematically search for other items which can be fixed up and sold at the thrift shop they have set up at the club. Because of the success of the group, the members usually stick together for social and play activities
Competent Deviant Behavior
Outside of school, Johnny has become an important member of a closely-knit group of boys who work in teams of two or three shoplifting small items from local stores. Sometimes the group breaks into (houses and apartments in the neighborhood) (homes in the community) (tenements and buildings in the neighborhood) to steal goods which one of the members then sells in other communities. The group has developed a procedure that makes it almost impossible to trace the goods that are taken. Because of the success of the group, the members usually stick together for social and play activities.
Incompetent Non-Deviant Behavior
Outside of school, Johnny likes to play baseball, football, or any other sport if he can find someone to play with. Although he is always there when teams are chosen, he is usually selected last or not at all. When this happens, he will stay around to watch the game. Sometimes Johnny will ride his bicycle to the shopping area and look in store windows or go to the park and look through the comic books he always carries with him. Occasionally, it will take him a long time to get home because he loses his way.

NOTE - The words in parentheses represent substitutions depending on the social class of the child.

Table 4
Chi Square Analysis For Social Classes Across Behaviors

	Upper-Middle Class		Lower-Middle Class		Lower Class	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Adaptive	60	82	36	73	59	87
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Non-Adaptive	13	18	13	27	9	13

$X^2 = 3.09$ n.s.

Table 5
Chi Square Analysis For Competent Non-Deviant Behavior Pattern

	Upper-Middle Class		Lower-Middle Class		Lower Class	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Adaptive	27	96	13	93	29	97
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Non-Adaptive	11	4	1	.7	1	3

$X^2 = 1.07$ n.s.

Table 6
Chi Square Analysis For Competent
Deviant Behavior Pattern

	Upper-Middle Class		Lower-Middle Class		Lower Class	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Adaptive	17	65	15	79	17	94
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Non-Adaptive	9	35	4	21	1	6

$X^2 = 6.89^*$

$^*p < .05$.

Table 7
Chi Square Analysis For Incompetent
Non-Deviant Behavior Pattern

	Upper-Middle Class		Lower-Middle Class		Lower Class	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Adaptive	16	84	8	50	13	65
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Non-Adaptive	3	16	8	50	7	35

$X^2 = 4.68$ n.s.

Table 8
Chi Square Analysis For Behaviors
Across Social Classes

	C-ND		C-D		I-ND	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Adaptive	69	96	49	78	37	67
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Non-Adaptive	3	4	14	22	18	33

$X^2 = 18.18^*$

$^*p < .05$.

Table 9
Chi Square Analysis For
Upper-Middle Class

	C-ND		C-D		I-ND	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Adaptive	27	96	17	65	16	84
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Non-Adaptive	1	4	9	35	3	16

$X^2 = 7.85^*$

$^*p < .05$.

Table 10
Chi Square Analysis For
Lower-Middle Class

	C-ND		C-D		I-ND	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Adaptive	13	93	15	79	8	50
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Non-Adaptive	1	7	4	21	8	50

$X^2 = 8.75^*$

$^*p < .05$.

Table 11
Chi Square Analysis
For Lower Class

	C-ND		C-D		I-ND	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Adaptive	29	97	17	94	13	65
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Non-Adaptive	1	3	1	6	7	35

$X^2 = 9.43^*$

$^*p < .05$.

Table 12
Cell Means and Standard Deviations
For Mental Retardation Label

Behavior	U-M	L-M	L	
C-ND	$\bar{x}$= 2.5 sd= 1.3 N= 26	$\bar{x}$= 2.8 sd= 1.5 N= 14	$\bar{x}$= 2.3 sd= 1.2 N= 31	$\bar{x}$= 2.5
C-D	$\bar{x}$= 3.0 sd= 1.1 N= 26	$\bar{x}$= 2.8 sd= 1.6 N= 19	$\bar{x}$= 2.2 sd= 1.3 N= 17	$\bar{x}$= 2.7
IC-ND	$\bar{x}$= 2.3 sd= 1.6 N= 22	$\bar{x}$= 2.6 sd= 1.3 N= 18	$\bar{x}$= 1.8 sd= .9 N= 20	$\bar{x}$= 2.2
	$\bar{x}$= 2.6	$\bar{x}$= 2.7	$\bar{x}$= 2.1	

Class

Table 13
ANOVA For Trend

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Social Class (SC)	2	12.2	6.1	3.6*
Linear	1	8.2	8.2	4.8*
Quadratic	1	4.0	4.0	2.4
Behavior (B)	2	7.9	3.9	2.3
Linear	1	3.4	3.4	1.9
Quadratic	1	4.5	4.5	2.6
SC x B	4	3.1	.8	.5
Error	184	312.8	1.7	

*$p < .05$.

Table 14
One-Way ANOVA For
C-ND Behavior Pattern

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Social Class	2	2.1	1.1	.7
Linear	1	.5	.5	.3
Quadratic	1	1.6	1.6	.9
Error	68	115.6	1.7	

Table 15
One-Way ANOVA For
C-D Behavior Pattern

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Social Class	2	6.1	3.1	1.7
Linear	1	5.7	5.7	3.2
Quadratic	1	.4	.4	.2
Error	59	106.2	1.8	

Table 16
One-Way ANOVA For
I-ND Behavior Pattern

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Social Class	2	6.6	3.3	1.9
Linear	1	3.2	3.2	1.9
Quadratic	1	3.4	3.4	2.1
Error	57	96.9	1.7	

Table 17
One-Way ANOVA For
Upper-Middle Class Profiles

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Behavior	2	6.2	3.1	1.8
Linear	1	.3	.3	.1
Quadratic	1	5.9	5.9	3.4
Error	71	120.7	1.7	

Table 18
One-Way ANOVA For
Lower-Middle Class Profiles

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Behavior	2	.7	.4	.2
Linear	1	.5	.5	.2
Quadratic	1	.2	.2	.1
Error	48	100.8	2.1	

Table 19
One-Way ANOVA For
Lower-Class Profiles

Source	df	SS	MS	F
Behavior	2	4.2	2.1	1.6
Linear	1	3.7	3.7	2.8
Quadratic	1	.5	.5	.4
Error	65	84.4	1.3	

Table 20

Point Biserial Correlations (r_{pbi}) Between Adaptiveness and Appropriateness of the Mental Retardation Label

Behavior \ Class	U-M	L-M	L	
C-ND	r_{pbi}=.13	r_{pbi}=.18	r_{pbi}=.21	r_{pbi}=.16
C-D	r_{pbi}=.15	r_{pbi}=.13	r_{pbi}=.17	r_{pbi}=.15
I-ND	r_{pbi}=.01	r_{pbi}=.06	r_{pbi}=.07	r_{pbi}=.04
	r_{pbi}=.20	r_{pbi}=.19	r_{pbi}=.02	$r_{(T)pbi}$=.13